Twitter Thread by Dr Matthew Ford



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People who haven't studied guns tend to assume that the evolution of small arms towards an assault rifle was in someway inevitable.

I'm here to say that this doesn't follow.

In this thread, I'll pickup on the US crossovers I referenced but didn't cash out in my last thread

1/

If you look closely, there is a tendency among some scholars to erroneously link 3 things:

-the qualities of the infantry

-the soldier's capacity to think & use weapons independently

-& the notion of a democratic values

2/

This really struck me when reading Stephen Biddle's really interesting (but obvs I don't agree with it) book:

3/

https://t.co/3pYHztTqD8

The problem with that argument is its underlying technological determinism that implies only democracies can really produce the type of soldier capable of employing weapons like assault rifles.
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The argument makes little empirical sense but it also demonstrates a misunderstanding as to how technologies emerge into the military organisation.

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From my point of view it also fails to explain how the US Army managed to conjure the relevant myths to allow it to switch allegiance from the rifle to the M-1 Garand to the M-16.

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After all, each one of these weapons symbolised the nation and its martial prowess even as it switched from a weapon for marksmen to a weapon used by conscripts in Vietnam.
7/

In this respect, the US Army needed to re-frame the institutional markers of its professionalism from marksmanship to something higher up than skill at arms.

8/

& there can be little doubt that this is reflected in the changing qualities of those soldiers it has recruited over time.

9/

This points to the need to be attentive to the demographic profiles of those being recruited.

But it also means paying attention to how the military mythologises its weapons & how they redescribe these myths in new stories about the systems they create.

10/

So while there's a tendency to assume the assault rifle was inevitable, there's a whole heap of social & cultural referencing that needs to be accounted for that explains why these things are in no way inevitable.

After all, US commanders didn't want to replace the Garand.

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